

Introduction

In late May 1718 the citizens of Charles Town, South Carolina awoke to a frightening prospect: the pirate Blackbeard, the “Devil incarnate,” lurked off the entrance to their harbor. His powerful flotilla of four ships, crewed by hundreds of pirates, mounted over sixty guns—enough to overwhelm the few scattered Royal Navy vessels in the hemisphere. With Charles Town at his mercy, Blackbeard blockaded the harbor, plundering vessels for a week and accumulating a rich haul of cash and supplies. Closely following a long Indian war, this shocking episode reinforced the sense of helplessness the Carolina authorities felt at being beleaguered by a plague of sea wolves.

Blackbeard then set a course for sparsely populated North Carolina, possibly seeking a place to careen and repair his fleet. Isolated Topsail Inlet, now Beaufort Inlet, and the village of Beaufort appeared to be an ideal location with a large but little used protected anchorage. When the flotilla arrived in early June, the three sloops easily passed through the treacherous inlet, but when the deep draft *Queen Anne’s Revenge* reached the bar she shuddered to a dead stop with the sails backed and the yards swinging aimlessly. Sloop *Adventure* slowly tacked back through the shoals to assist the flagship, but shortly *Adventure* too was hard aground. By the end of the day, the crew had abandoned the listing derelicts to the merciless wind and waves. Through the summer and fall the impoverished villagers salvaged what they could from the wrecks, and the vessels gradually disappeared beneath the surface, breaking up in the nor’easters and hurricanes that frequent this coast.

Nearly three centuries later, in November 1996, Phil Masters and Mike Daniel of Intersal, Inc., who were seeking a Spanish treasure ship lost in 1750, found a shipwreck off Beaufort Inlet. The artifacts initially recovered from the wreck identified it as early eighteenth century, opening the possibility that it might be one of the pirate vessels. The state designated the site 31CR314. A landmark agreement between Intersal, the Maritime Research Institute, and the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources turned the wreck and its artifacts over to the state for archaeological investigation and recovery.

The *Queen Anne’s Revenge* Shipwreck Project was organized under the oversight of the Office of State Archaeology and the Underwater Archaeology Branch. Over the past decade the project has brought to bear on this wreck intense multi-disciplinary historical and archaeological research and scientific analysis that has produced a comprehensive portrait of this vessel and the site. The archaeological record of 31CR314 so far reveals a vessel that is approximately 90 feet in length and 200-300 tons in burden. There is evidence of three masts. So far, 25 cannon have been discovered, the largest being six-pounders. The latest dated artifact is a Swedish cannon of 1713, which provides the current *terminus post quem* date for the wreck—the date after which the wreck occurred. Collectively the datable artifacts span the period from 1690 through the first two decades of the